

By the Kansas State Historical Society

The Custom of Czech Egg Decorating

Many Czech immigrants came to Kansas. They had left the region of Bohemia for many reasons. Today that region in central Europe is the Czech Republic.

Easter was an important holiday for the Czech people. That is why many Czechs brought their Easter traditions to Kansas. One custom they brought was decorating eggs. It is a very old custom. It is important because the egg is a symbol of new life. Eggs are thought to bring good health. That is why some Czechs in Kansas still decorate eggs the way they did a long time ago.



There are two types of Easter eggs. One is a solid color egg that has been hardboiled. It can be eaten when the shell is removed. The second type of egg is one that is highly decorated. These eggs have the inside emptied. Czechs call these eggs *kraslice*. That means beautiful egg. Once the egg is decorated, a small hole is made at each end. By blowing in one hole the insides of the egg come out the other hole. These eggs are given as gifts. Czech children would give their most beautiful egg to their best friend. This custom was a symbol of friendship and good things to come.

Kraslice are made by using wax and colors of dye to decorate the shell of the egg. The wax is used to draw a design on the egg. Then the egg is placed in the dye. Where there is wax the dye will not color the shell. The design is made by adding more wax to "resist" the dye before the egg is put into another color of dye. Several colors of dye are used. Light colors are used first and darker colors last.





In central Europe each region of Czech villages had its own designs. These designs were passed down from parent to child. One of the most popular *kraslice* designs is the eight-pointed star. A long time ago, people believed that each time a child was born, so was a star. Each person had his or her own star to protect him or her. Other popular symbols include butterflies and hearts. Red was the most popular color for *kraslice*.

When Czech immigrants settled in central Kansas, they continued to decorate the eggs with their special designs. Today that custom of decorating Easter eggs continues.

